



DESRON 26 commodore awards Eagle Scout rank to nephew during Fleet Week

By Mass Communications Specialist 2nd Class Matt Grills, Fleet Week New York Public Affairs

NEW YORK -- Commodore Richard L. Williams, commander, Destroyer Squadron 26, and the crew of USS Oscar Austin (DDG 79) hosted an Eagle Court of Honor for Boy Scout Troop 174 of Yorktown Heights, N.Y., May 26 aboard the guided missile destroyer's aft gunner deck.

During the ceremony, Williams joined the leaders of Troop 174 in officially awarding his nephew, Rick V. DiRenno, 17, of Mohegan Lake, N.Y., the coveted rank of Eagle Scout. An Eagle Scout himself, Williams administered the Eagle oath and with his sister, Cheryl, presented DiRenno with the Eagle badge. Following the ceremony, more than 100 family members and friends attended a reception and toured the Oscar Austin, which is currently moored at Staten Island's Stapleton Pier for the 20th anniversary celebration of Fleet Week New York.

"I'm proud of Rick," Williams said. "To be a Boy Scout is not the most popular thing nowadays. For him to stay the course took honor, courage and commitment, which just happen to be the Navy's core values."

DiRenno proudly accepted his Eagle Scout medal, a silk Eagle neckerchief and clasp, and dozens of congratulatory letters from prominent figures, including President George W. Bush, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Gen. Peter Pace, New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer and New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo.

Oscar Austin officers coordinated the ceremony and applauded as DiRenno stood to be honored.

“I do think it’s so generous of the Navy to do this for me,” he said “I couldn’t have asked for a better place to celebrate achieving Scouting’s highest rank.”

Christopher Long, past Scoutmaster for Troop 174 and DiRenno’s mentor, presented the troop’s newest and 55th Eagle Scout with a walking stick engraved with his initials.

“Rick’s finest quality is his humility,” Long said. “He’s a humble young man who always extends his hand to those in need. He’s also devoted to helping young Scouts on their own journeys.”

DiRenno’s parents, Vincent and Cheryl, said their son has overcome a number of obstacles on his way to becoming an Eagle Scout. Epilepsy left him with a lack of strength in his right arm, leaving his mother to wonder how he would achieve certain merit badges -- archery and shooting, for example. DiRenno refused to settle for anything less than 52, though the Eagle rank requires only 21 merit badges.

“We never had any doubt he could do it,” Cheryl said. “We never pushed him. He pushed us.”

For his Eagle Scout project, DiRenno chose to repair a lengthy cedar fence surrounding The Seabury at Fieldhome, an assisted-living facility on the border of Cortlandt Manor and Yorktown, N.Y. He led a group of Scouts in completing more than 500 hours of work that included washing, painting and staining the fence.

As operations officer at Fieldhome, Cmdr. Anthony DeMan of the Office of Naval Research oversaw DiRenno’s project and said the Eagle Scout is a role model for others. “I hope my children will follow in his footsteps,” he said.

DiRenno, who credits his uncle’s accomplishments in both Scouting and the Navy as much of his inspiration, accepted his Eagle medal wearing a sash full of badges and camouflage pants.

“This is a dream come true for Rick,” his mother said of the shipboard ceremony. “The military has defined his life.”

The court of honor included five of DiRenno’s fellow Eagle Scouts, several of whom plan on pursuing military careers. In fact, Long’s son, Jason, is preparing to join

the Marine Corps. His older brother, Christopher, is a Marine sergeant with the 2nd Radio Battalion. Both are Eagle Scouts.

“I am extremely impressed with the Scout community, and I couldn’t think of a finer venue than to bring them onboard during Fleet Week,” Williams said. “Many of these young men will go into the Navy or become Marines. It is our privilege to help recognize that.”

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